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ABSTRACT

Social studies teachers at all levels are confused about the nature and purpose of social studies. Pre-service teachers (260) enrolled in undergraduate methods courses in four universities (University of Maine, Auburn University, Texas Tech University, Eastern Montana College) were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the purpose of social studies and the effect of background variables on those perceptions. Although significant differences occurred sporadically throughout the data, pre-service teachers generally preferred the reflective inquiry approach to social studies over that of social studies as citizenship transmission or as social science; this contradicted expectations and previous findings on perceptions of experienced teachers. Older students supported the reflective inquiry approach more strongly, while rural students were less positive toward non-traditional instructional approaches and may have greater needs for structure. Students majoring in early childhood education, elementary education or secondary education tended to prefer the social science approach. Geographical background had no correlation to perceptions of pre-service teachers, suggesting that confusion regarding social studies is a nationwide phenomenon. Research recommendations included: studying the influences of classroom supervising teachers, curriculum materials, and the predispositions of methods instructors; and tracing the philosophical development of students to the implementation of their philosophy in the classroom. (SB)

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Pre-Service Intern Perceptions Regarding the Nature of Social Studies Education: The Rural Respondent

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Introduction

It is abundantly clear that the nature and purpose of social studies continues to be cluttered with uncertainty (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1977). The paucity of empirical data available pertaining to the unanswered question of what perceptions preservice teachers hold, regardless of geographical background, of social studies education, as a matter of fact, led to this study. In many methods classes, students are enrolled who represent a variety of backgrounds. Invariably, some have been reared in rural settings, while others grew up in urban or suburban environments. Instructors may speculate that the background experience of the students might have an impact on their perceptions of social studies (Cosby & Charner, 1978). It is hoped that by gathering and analyzing data related to this question, that needs of undergraduate methods class instructors could be served.

Review of Research

There is a limited amount of data available related to preservice student perception of social studies. Further, there is no data available regarding these perceptions and their relationships to the respondent socio-biographical variable of community-type in which they were reared.

There is an abundance of information available, however, about the disagreements and differences of opinion which exist among teacher educators in general. Controversy dominates discussions between educators on what should be included in teacher preparation, for example

(Van Til, 1968). This finding portrays a prevalent atmosphere in the field of social studies, where much has been published (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977[a]; Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977[b]) concerning the century-long lack of agreement and confusion about what the content, goals and teacher roles in social studies are and should be. Numerous authors (Brubaker, 1967; Brubaker, Simon, and Williams, 1977; Barr, Barth, and Shermis, 1977[a]; Shaver, Davis, and Helburn, 1979; Gross, 1977; Morrisett, 1977; Nelson and Palonsky, 1980) have noted that the field of social studies defies agreement of primary purpose and content. Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977[a]) state that:

> The content of social studies is smorgasbord of this and that from everywhere; it is as confusing and vague as is the goal of citizenship, for not only do social studies educators have conflicting ideas as to how to create a "good" citizen, they cannot even agree on the meaning of the term. One wonders, then, what is left to be said of a field which uses a loose confederation of separate subjects for its content and has little or no agreement regarding goals and objectives (p. 2).

Their investigation addresses 100 years of controversy. Additionally, it identifies a variety of factors influential in social studies education. These authors conclude after much investigation, that not only does the relationship between the social sciences and social studies remain unclear after years of controversy, but that social studies educators at all levels of teaching continue to be confused about the function and purposes of social studies. They go on to identify three distinct approaches to social studies education and their conclusion suggests that almost every study of social studies teacher behavior indicates that the "social studies as citizenship transmission" approach to teaching is most frequently favored by instructors in the field

(1977[4] p. 59). Additionally[3], others (Cornbleth, 1974) noted that even if social studies educators stated that they subscribe to a specific theory, that it may not necessarily be utilized in their curricula practices. This finding is encouraging considering the Barr, Barth, and Shermis observation.

Only one study has been undertaken to collect empirical data regarding student perceptions concerning social studies education. Nelson and Palonsky (1980) conducted an interview study to ascertain the perceptions of the primary purpose, primary content, and definition of social studies as identified by undergraduate secondary students completing social studies student teaching. It was found that the respondents were puzzled by questions pertaining to the very definition of social studies. Additionally, they were confused about the primary content of the field of social studies. Although the sample was too small to provide broad generalizations, their study did raise several questions. Among these were: 1) Is the confusion in the field a positive or negative aspect of social studies? 2) Is the confusion greater than that in other curriculum areas? 3) What should social studies teacher educators do about the diverse definitions and rationales prevalent in their field? 4) What are the long-term effects of this confusion upon social studies teachers? 5) What influence does teacher perception of social studies actually have on curricular and teaching decisions?

Methodology and Findings

A major objective of this study was to determine perceptions of pre-service social studies teachers enrolled in undergraduate methods

courses regarding the purpose of social studies education. An additional objective was to analyze these perceptions and their relationships to selected biographical variables, including geographical background. It was hoped that by investigating biographical variables, in particular, that some patterns would emerge. The following hypotheses were analyzed:

HO_1 There are no significant differences with respect to pre-service student perceptions regarding social studies education according to the three distinct approaches (citizenship transmission, social science and reflective inquiry).

HO_2 There are no significant differences with respect to student perceptions of the purpose of social studies education when related to:

a. age of respondent
b. academic major
c. type of community reared in (rural, non-rural)
d. geographic regions of the country represented

The data presented in this study were collected through the use of the Social Studies Preference Table found in The Nature of The Social Studies (Barr, Barth, and Shermis, 1977[b]). The table was administered to two hundred and sixty preservice students enrolled at the University of Maine, Auburn University, Texas Tech University, and Eastern Montana College. Additionally, several questions were posed related to socio-biographical attributes of the students involved in the study.

Data were analyzed through the use of the contingency table analysis technique. Data were processed through a matrix consisting of three patterns, each representing a purpose of the social studies, and nine cells, each representing a sub-category of a pattern.

Notably, a significant difference existed between students who agreed and students who disagreed regarding preference for the three patterns of Social Studies. A chi square value of 19.226 was found to be significant at the .05 level in this case. The null hypothesis HO_1, therefore, was rejected. Pre-service teachers in this study preferred the reflective inquiry approach over that of citizenship transmission or social science. This noteworthy finding contradicts that of the Barr, Barth, and Shermis study which focused on perceptions of experienced teachers.

According to the tabulations for HO_2, the biographical variables of age, major, and type of community reared in (rural or non-rural), were found to be significant sporadically throughout the cell matrix. Geographic region (national quadrants) of the respondent was the only variable which failed to measure any significant difference. Table 1 reflects the chi square value for the biographical variables. The null hypotheses, therefore, related to age, major, and type of community reared in were rejected, but the null hypothesis regarding geographic region of the country was accepted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Broad generalizations cannot be made from this study, as it involved a relatively small sample of the nationwide population. Reasonable inferences may be made, however, to assist social studies instructors who are involved in educating pre-service students.

The data suggest that pre-service teachers tend to select the reflective inquiry approach over other options. A closer analysis of each cell does not indicate a clear direction, however. Many different

TABLE 1

CHI SQUARE VALUES OF BIOGRAPHICAL VARIABLES

	Pattern 1 Social Studies as Citizenship Transmission		Pattern 2 Social Studies as Social Science		Pattern 3 Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry	
	x^2	sig.	x^2	sig.	x^2	sig.
Patterns						
a.	3.688	.719	3.127	.793	13.865	.031*
b.	17.381	.136	21.229	.047*	5.978	.917
c.	10.843	.542	6.284	.901	12.343	.419
d.	7.565	.579	4.925	.841	6.214	.718
Purpose	1		4		7	
a.	8.277	.219	2.816	.831	8.092	.232
b.	14.624	.263	25.969	.011*	15.816	.199
c.	18.434	.103	15.523	.214	15.896	.196
d.	10.475	.313	8.043	.530	6.003	.740
Method	2		5		8	
a.	5.602	.469	7.435	.283	6.781	.342
b.	12.82	.382	6.975	.859	26.674	.016*
c.	17.686	.126	7.905	.793	31.445	.002*
d.	5.619	.777	5.552	.784	5.012	.833
Content	3		6		9	
a.	4.905	.556	5.632	.466	2.224	.695
b.	7.261	.84	10.268	.592	2.66	.953
c.	9.129	.692	4.337	.977	4.468	.813
d.	8.272	.507	6.292	.710	11.005	.088

a. age
b. major
c. community (rural or non-rural)
d. geographic region

*Significant at the .05 level

points of view were acceptable to the respondents simultaneously. Statements which actually contradict one another if implemented were selected by some, as a matter of fact. This confusion may account for the limited lack of significant differences among the various cells.

Although significant differences occurred in a scattered pattern throughout the cells, the method of teaching social studies as reflective inquiry registered the most significant concentration of differences. Students from rural backgrounds were less positive about using the reflective inquiry method than others. This finding supports the notion that those who come from rural backgrounds may have greater needs for structure than those from non-rural settings (Sher, 1977). Additionally, older students were more supportive of accepting pattern III (Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry) than younger respondents. Frequently, these categories of students are those who do not want "history taught in the traditional sense," the way they were taught. Students not indicating a major, as well as those indicating early childhood, elementary or secondary majors, registered significant support for pattern II (Social Studies as Social Science). It may be reasonable to assume that these are students who wanted to be certified but who did not have the education profession as their first career choice. Often these students are enrolled in Arts and Science programs and, therefore, value the instructional model used by most social scientists. A sizeable percentage of K-8 pre-service teachers did not favor teaching Social Studies as Social Sciences, although they did not cluster together when asked to identify the approach they did favor most highly.

Since the variable of geographic region (quadrant) of the country indicated no significant differences in any cell or pattern, this finding adds to the data base suggesting that the confusion of preservice student perceptions is a national phenomena.

The next step in this area of research is to penetrate beyond the status level. A task force might be formed, for example, to develop curriculum materials for use in pre-service methods classes. Diagnostic and prescriptive techniques could be employed by the methods teacher when addressing the topic of preferred instructional approach. Those from rural backgrounds, for example, might be encouraged to engage in special tasks related to the acquisition of non-traditional teaching skills.

The following additional recommendations are made for research:

1. Studies on the predisposition of methods instructors regarding the nature of social studies education.
2. Studies on the influence of methods instructors and curriculum materials utilized dealing with differing philosophies.
3. Studies on the philosophical influence of classroom supervising teachers on student teachers.
4. Studies (longitudinal) on tracing the philosophical development of pre-service students to the implementation of their philosophy in the classroom.
5. Studies on the relationship of student developmental stages and the compatibility of the various traditions of the social studies.

Summary

In summary, respondents in this study indicated some difference in perception regarding the purposes of social studies education. Simultaneously, however, they indicated general acceptance of each of the

philosophies predominate in the field. Similar perceptions prevailed when the respondents were clustered by the variables of age, major, community, and geographic region. When the variable of rural or non-rural background was investigated, the data supported the notion that rural students did not prefer non-traditional instructional approaches when given opportunities for choice-making. The data support the widespread view that a potpourri of opinion exists in the area of social studies education. These findings have serious implications for method and content selection in pre-service social studies education classes.

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